

## Central Corridor: Stage Is Set for LRT

2006 has been an important and productive year for **Light Rail Transit** plans in Saint Paul. After four years of debate and negotiations, the region received the go-ahead from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to begin Preliminary Engineering on the **Central Corridor project ①**, which connects downtown Saint Paul with the University of Minnesota and downtown Minneapolis via University Avenue.

Beginning in 2005, staff from the City, County and Chambers of Commerce surveyed businesses along the entire length of University Avenue in Saint Paul about business needs and the potential for LRT. (See findings at: <http://www.stpaul.gov/initiatives/centralcorridor/>).

In 2006, Mayor Chris Coleman asked the Planning Commission to establish two task forces to develop a Central Corridor Vision and Development Strategy—the University Avenue Central Corridor Task Force and the Capitol/Downtown Central Corridor Task Force. The City hired the consulting firm of Urban Strategies Inc. to assist in the work, and several staff members from the Mayor's Office, the Department of Planning and Economic

Development, and the Department of and Public Works are involved in the planning.

As requested by the Mayor, the two task forces are engaging a broad array of stakeholders to become informed and to explore the issues, opportunities, and impacts that LRT will bring. In addition to their regular working meetings, the task forces are hosting community open houses throughout the process to inform the community and invite comments.

The development strategy that will emerge from this process in March 2007 will be a pro-active guide for future land use and development. It will help to manage change along the LRT route and maximize the city-building benefits of the forthcoming infrastructure investments. After full public review, the **Central Corridor Development Strategy** will be adopted as part of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

2007 Central Corridor work will determine the scope of the LRT project and begin designing the system. Several station area plans will be started. Additional work will include more business and workforce outreach, and special studies on parking, pedestrian access, bike routes, public art, corridor greening, and public safety.

## Comp Plan 2008

The Planning Commission approved the report of its Long-Range Planning Committee, **A Lens for the Future: Saint Paul for the Next 25 Years**. It describes major changes in the city over the last twenty-five years, and outlines emergent trends that will impact the city's future. It provides a long-range context for making City decisions and for starting the new Comprehensive Plan.

A new **Comprehensive Plan 2008**, mandated by state law, provides the City an opportunity to determine strategies and policies for land use, transportation, housing, parks, and water issues over the coming decade (2008-2018). The Planning Commission established five task forces on these subjects comprised of technical experts and city residents. To kick off the process, the Planning Commission held four forums on demographics, city infrastructure, social disparities, and labor markets. The Comprehensive Planning Committee also prepared the **Scoping Report**, which lays out the work program, schedule, and public participation activities for the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan.



## Comprehensive Planning

The Planning Commission received a briefing on **Mayor Coleman's Strategic Plan** so that work on the Comprehensive Plan will be consistent with its themes.

After a series of joint meetings with the Capital Improvement Budget Committee and STAR Board, the Planning Commission recommended a **set of changes in the CIB process** to the Mayor and the City Council.

The Capitol Region Watershed District and the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District jointly promulgated **surface water management rules** that cover most of the city. The Planning Commission reviewed and commented on the rules, which took effect in October and are being coordinated with the City's site plan review process.

The Planning Commission co-sponsored a community public hearing on updated **Mississippi River Critical Area Regulations ②** prepared by the Critical Area Task Force. The task force's extensive zoning amendments were referred to the Planning Commission, which will complete a review and make recommendations on them in 2007.

After gathering property, household, and neighborhood-based data, a Strategic Information Team of city planners prepared a set of maps that showed areas of the city under stress. The maps were presented to the Mayor, City departments, and City Council, and will inform the emerging **Invest Saint Paul** initiative by helping illustrate the scope of problems and identifying general priority areas for policy intervention.

## Neighborhood Planning

### North End

The **Loeb Lake Small Area Plan and Zoning Study ③**, which addresses the area surrounding Marydale Park and Willow Reserve, was adopted by the City Council. The plan recommended redeveloping the vacant Jefferson-Smurfit parcel into medium-density housing, the Larson Nursery into townhomes, and the southeast corner of Maryland and Dale as the site for a larger, transit-oriented building. These properties were rezoned to TN2.

### East Side

The **Phalen-Atlantic Plan ④**, which includes the Globe site and existing industrial properties north of Phalen Boulevard, was adopted. It establishes a foundation for light industrial redevelopment at the eastern end of the corridor. The area was rezoned to Light Industrial Restricted (IR), a district created to permit a wide range of light industrial uses and to require design standards intended to make industry compatible with adjacent residential communities.

The concept for the **Arcade Street Small Area Plan ⑤** capitalizes on the street's proximity to downtown Saint Paul and to I-35E and Phalen Boulevard. While the key commercial nodes of Arcade/Maryland and Arcade/Phalen, will serve surrounding neighborhoods with community retail stores, the vision for the rest of the street is future development of destination commercial, office, institutional, light industrial, and multiple-family housing.

The Commission will hold a public hearing on the draft plan in January 2007.

### University Avenue

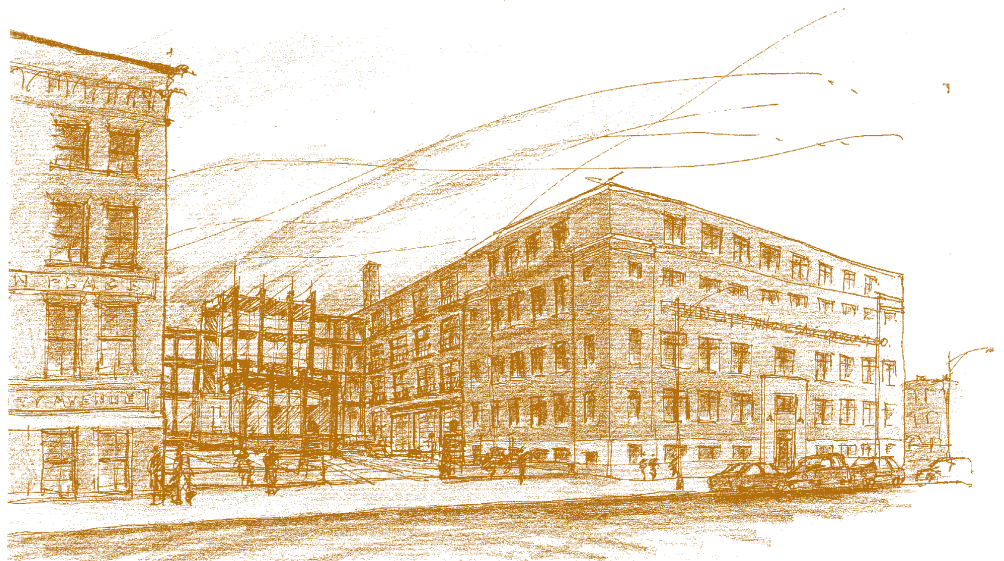
Joining the existing Aldi grocery store and TCF bank building on the partially vacant **southwest corner of Lexington and University ⑥**, the Wilder Foundation began construction of a new headquarters facility, and Episcopal Homes began construction on a new 50-unit low-income senior housing development. The Lexington Park Design Advisory Group, a group of community representatives, provided input to the City on zoning, site plans, and design issues, assisted by Planning staff. A two-acre portion of the site remains undeveloped, where a mixed use housing and commercial development has been tentatively proposed.

### Highland Park

In response to the Ford Motor Company's announcement that it plans to close its Saint Paul assembly plant in 2008, the City began work toward a large-scale planning effort to consider reuse and development scenarios for the **Ford Plant ⑦** site. In 2007, a visioning process will be undertaken in conjunction with Ford, the Mayor's Office, a Planning Commission-appointed task force, the Ward 3 Office, other City agencies, consultants, and public and private stakeholders.

### West Side

The **Stryker-George Precinct Plan ⑧** was adopted. It lays out redevelopment opportunities and streetscape improvements near the center of the West Side neighborhood.



Rendering of Carlton Place



## Downtown

The **Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan 9** was adopted for the northern part of the downtown along the freeway's common section. It envisions a high density downtown neighborhood, including offices and housing centered on a new full-block park.

To facilitate financing for redevelopment of the **Public Safety block 9** into the Penfield condominiums and for the expansion of **Region's Hospital 10**, the Planning Commission recommended adding more blocks to the existing redevelopment districts.

## District Plans

An amendment to the **North End–South Como District Plan 11** was adopted to incorporate policies from the expiring Wheelock Bluff Plan that protect bluffs, water resources, and views.

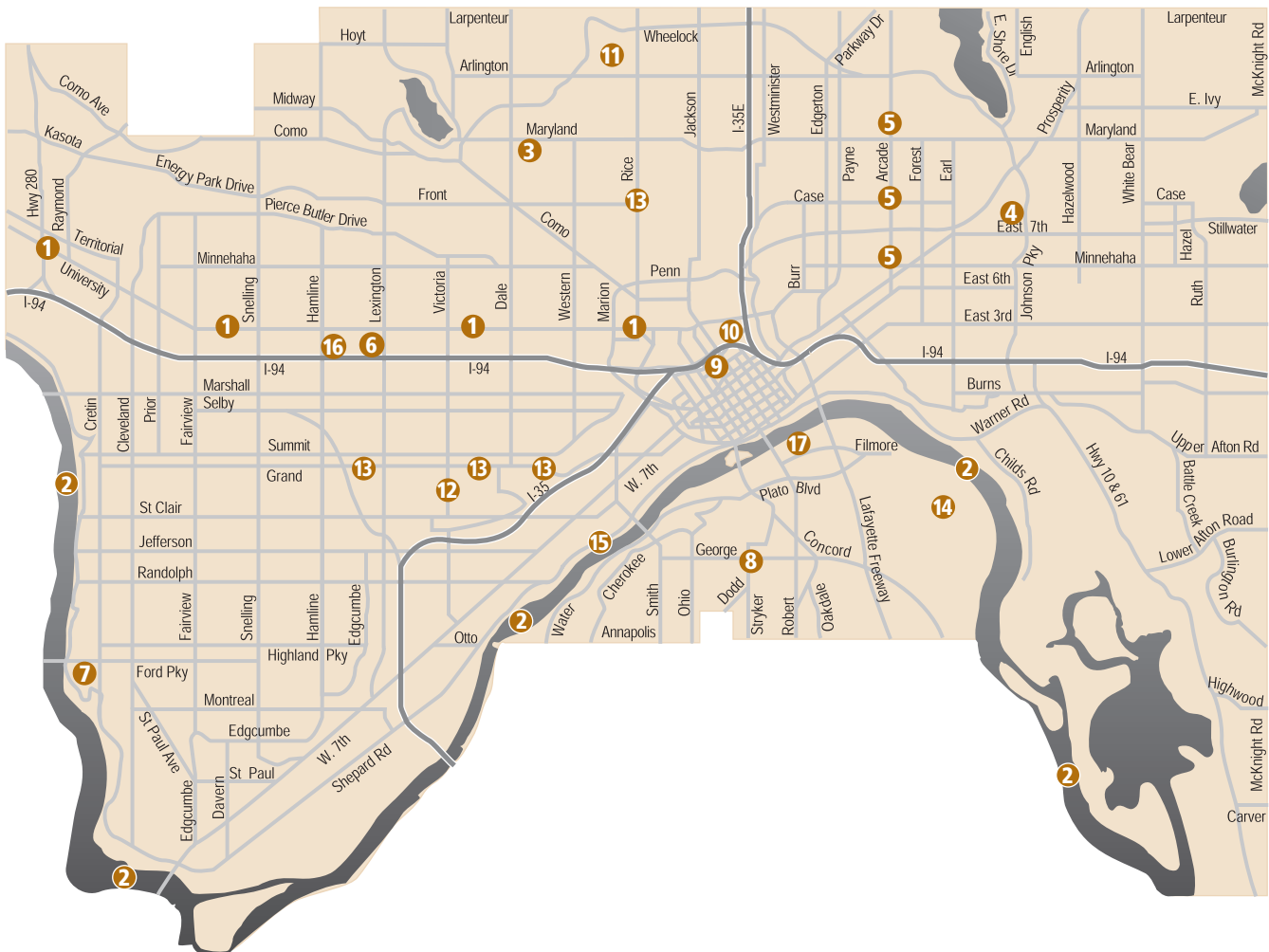
The City Council adopted a summary of the **Summit Hill Plan 12** that encourages

improvements to the existing housing stock, addresses parking concerns, and focuses particular attention on Grand Avenue as a mixed-use corridor. After approving the policies in the plan, the City Council adopted the **East Grand Avenue Overlay Zoning District 13** from Oakland Avenue to Ayd Mill Road. The overlay district eliminates the "Rule of Five" parking provision, applies TN2 design standards to new development, and limits the footprint, total square footage, and height of new buildings.

Several more district plans (**Thomas-Dale, Summit-University, Como Park, St. Anthony Park, Snelling Hamline, and Highland Park**) were submitted to the City for review. In 2006, staff worked with the communities and other City departments to prepare summaries of each plan. The summaries will be reviewed by the Planning Commission in 2007.



*The Penfield condominiums*



## Zoning

To reduce flooding at the Downtown Airport, the Metropolitan Airports Commission sought approval of a site plan and variances to excavate part of the shoreline and build a **floodwall on Holman Field 14**. After the City Council overturned the controversial Planning Commission approval, Mayor Coleman called on the Riverfront Corporation to assist with a revised project design. The revised design identified open space opportunities and included decorative features on the floodwall itself. It was approved by the Planning Commission and subsequently by the City Council.

The Planning Commission reviewed and approved a detailed **site plan** for the new **Xcel High Bridge Plant 15**. In 2005 it had approved permits for the footings and foundation of the new plant.

At the City Council's request and after holding a public hearing, the Planning Commission reviewed and recommended amendments to the **sign regulations for temporary signs, light pole banners, and skyway banners**. A public hearing is pending at the City Council.

The Planning Commission approved a site plan and parking variance for a new urban **SuperTarget store 16** at I-94 and Hamline, which included enhancements to design, pedestrian-friendliness, and landscaping, as well as a goal for local hiring. The construction of the new store means the existing Target parking lot on University Avenue will be available for redevelopment in 2008.

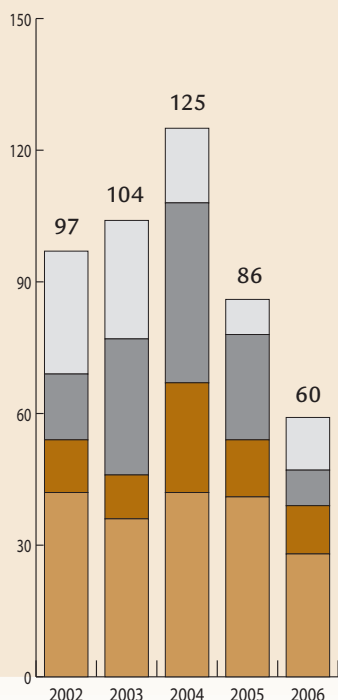
The Parks and Recreation Department initiated a study to amend the City subdivision ordinance to include requirements for parkland, either through land dedication or by payment of cash in lieu of land. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the draft **Parkland Dedication Ordinance** and forwarded recommendations to the Mayor and City Council.

To encourage industrial development with a high job component and compatibility with nearby non-industrial uses, the most restrictive industrial district was renamed the **Industrial Restricted Zoning District**, and was changed so that it could be applied outside the river corridor. Property in the Phalen-Atlantic area was rezoned to the new IR category.

In order to develop the **Bridges of Saint Paul 17** project in the area across from the downtown between the Robert Street and Lafayette bridges, JLT Group applied to rezone the property from TN3, I1, and I2 to B5 Central Business Service District. The Planning Commission voted to recommend denial of the rezoning application, and JLT withdrew the application prior to the City Council public hearing.

In what was an otherwise busy year for the Planning Commission and staff, the number of zoning cases dropped, as shown to the left.

Zoning Cases 2002–2006



- Rezoning
- Nonconforming Use Permits and Change in Nonconforming Use Permits
- Conditional Use Permit
- Other: Determinations of Similar Use, River Corridor Modifications, Sign Variances, Administrative Reviews, Site Plan Reviews, PC Variances



### CITY OF SAINT PAUL

Christopher B. Coleman  
Mayor, 2006

The Planning Commission is staffed by the Department of Planning and Economic Development

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